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Statement submitted by Mountain Institute, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

A plea for attention to the highland communities that steward the world's mountain environments

We thank the United Nations for the opportunity to present a written statement for the 2016 ECOSOC High Level Segment. The Mountain Institute applauds the theme of "ensuring that no one is left behind." We are writing because of our concern that mountain people and environments are at risk of neglect in the global sustainable development agenda. In our view, if these concerns are not vigorously addressed, fully delivering against many of the SDGs by 2030 will be at risk.

Mountains harbour indigenous cultures, vibrant communities, vigorous economies, and globally important natural resources including high levels of biological diversity. Amongst natural assets, the world's highlands provide fully half of the world's population with the freshwater they depend on for drinking, domestic use, irrigation, industry, and hydropower.

However, mountain people include some of the world's poorest and most marginalized communities. Further, some 329 million people living in mountains — primarily in developing countries — lack food security. Given that mountains contain only 13 percent of the total human population, this represents a deeply unbalanced 42 percent of the nearly 800 million people that are food insecure globally.

Furthermore, mountain areas are strikingly vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards. This is happening against a backdrop of widespread environmental degradation, deforestation, and unsustainable development in the world's highlands. These factors are reducing environmental sustainability, societal resilience, and economic options for mountain people around the world.

In response to these and other challenges, poverty and hunger eradication, gender equality, improved health, decent work opportunities, quality education, economic growth, infrastructure development, and general promotion of sustainability must reach the most remote and marginalized mountain communities. Without such focused attention, they will be unable to care for their local environments, nor respond resiliently to future social, economic, and environmental change.

Mountain people and environments need to be at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efforts must advance the SDGs broadly in mountains, rather than just the three targets that specifically mention them in Goals 6 and 15. We are deeply concerned that in 2030, without such attention, entrenched pockets of poverty, social and economic marginalization, and continued environmental degradation will persist in the world's mountains. Without action, consequences will be far-reaching, even negatively affecting mountain-water dependent communities and economies in the world's lowlands.

The Mountain Institute, an NGO in special consultative status, is a proud member of the United Nation's Mountain Partnership where we serve as Chair of the Steering Committee.

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